1975, we have resettled approximately 249,000 Lao refugees (mostly Hmong) out of Thailand. We have provided a large share of the support that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has received to maintain refugee camps and we and non-governmental organizations assist programs in Laos for refugees who have elected to return home. With only some 6,000 Lao refugees remaining in camps in Thailand we are committed to these same two solutions: voluntary repatriation and third country resettlement.

As you state in your letter, we have for some time requested permission of the Royal Thai Government to be allowed to interview those remaining Hmong and other Lao refugees in camps in Thailand who may wish to resettle in the United States. In November, a team of officers led by Department of State Deputy Assistant Secretary Charles Sykes went to Bangkok specifically to discuss this issue. I am pleased to report that we reached an agreement in principle with the Royal Thai Government for U.S. access to Hmong and other Lao in the first asylum camps in Thailand. We are now working to finalize the agreement and hope to begin processing this population in early January. Within the FY 1996 refugee admissions ceiling there are sufficient numbers available for approved Laotian cases to be admitted to the U.S. this fis-

cal year.

We would also like to assure you that, contrary to reports, to date, no asylum seekers or refugees have been forced to return to Laos. Approxiamtely 23,000 Lao (mostly Hmong) have returned voluntarily to Laos since 1980. From all reprots, including nongovernmental organizations working in Laos and from U.N. officials, there is no persecution of returnees. The United States and other governments contribute to reintegration programs which assist returnees to resettle in Laos. UNHCR has Hmong- and Laospeaking monitors who travel throughout the country to assist returnees and to monitor their situation. These monitors have reported no persecution of returnees.

We hope that the above information ad-

We hope that the above information addresses your concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact this office again if we can be of further assistance.

Since rely,

WENDY SHERMAN, Assistant Secretary, Legislative Affairs.

SALUTING THE 150TH ANNIVER-SARY OF FELIX LODGE NO. 3

HON. LOUIS STOKES

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 27, 1996

Mr. STOKES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to an esteemed historical institution in the District of Columbia, Felix Lodge No. 3. The Felix Lodge, the second oldest Prince Hall Masonic Lodge in the District, will celebrate its 150th anniversary in 1996.

The Felix Lodge has traveled a long and distinguished road from its inception, when meetings were held in the loft of a stable just outside Washington. Chartered on April 4, 1846, by the Hiram Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, the Felix Lodge was named in honor of Brother Felix Dorsey, who was a deputy grand master of the Hiram Grand Lodge. Brother Dorsey was pivotal in the advent of Masonry for African-Americans in the District of Columbia.

Through the bravery of men seeking freedom and fraternity, the birth of the Felix Lodge

was quite an accomplishment, especially before the Civil War. Several other sites in Washington, including a carpenter's shop and personal residences, became the lodge's surreptitious meeting sites throughout the 19th century and into the 20th. In 1922, the lodge moved to the Masonic Temple on U Street, in Northwest Washington.

Many prestigious members of the Felix Lodge have served in greater roles of the Masonic hierarchy. George W. Brooks, the first African-American doctor licensed in Washington, became most worshipful grand master in 1878. The Felix Lodge also produced 10 Grand Masters. In addition, the lodge has a proud tradition of trailblazing activities, such as conducting Washington's first black Masonic funeral in 1849, and involvement in civic ceremonies like the opening of Union Station.

Mr. Speaker, the long and eminent history of Felix Lodge No. 3 deserves our attention and respect. I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring their 150th anniversary and saluting the gentlemen, past and present, of Felix Lodge.

TRIBUTE TO DONALD BROOKS

HON. WILLIAM O. LIPINSKI

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 27, 1996

Mr. LIPINSKI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my condolences to the many friends and family of Donald Brooks, a leading businessman from my congressional district, who recently passed away.

Donald Brooks, a resident of Western Springs, IL, and owner of Marcia's Hallmark Card Shop, was a longtime pillar of the La Grange, IL, business community. He was a leader in the La Grange Business Association, serving as its treasurer, and he spearheaded efforts to make the downtown retail shopping area among the finest in suburban Chicago.

Mr. Brooks, a pharmacist who owned a drug store for 24 years, was an early organizer of the Endless Summer Festival that brings tens of thousands of residents into the community each summer. In addition, he was an important nuts and bolts organizer who coordinated the LGBA's cable television advertisements and served as the group's pointman on downtown parking issues with village government.

In addition, Mr. Brooks, a graduate of Lyons Township High School in La Grange, served his country as a member of the Air Force Reserves during the Vietnam war.

Mr. Speaker, I extend my sympathy to Mr. Brooks' wife, Marcia Jane, and all his friends and family on the untimely passing of this true community leader.

CONDOLENCES TO THE FERRE FAMILY

HON. ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 27, 1996

Ms. ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences to the Ferre family, a distinguished and dedicated family within the

Miami community and to Metro Dade commissioner and Miami's ex-mayor, Maurice Ferre, who suffered the tragic loss of his son, Francisco Ferre Malaussena, his daughter-in-law, Mariana Gomez de Ferre, and the couple's newly born son, Felipe Antonio Ferre Gomez, on the fatal American Airlines Boeing 757 en route to Cali, Colombia on December 20.

It is at moments such as these when one asks God for strength and guidance in order to overcome this tragedy that took the life of this young aspiring attorney, his beautiful and well-educated wife, and their adorable, newly born son who were all on their way to the infant's christening in Cali, Colombia.

Francisco, who was a graduate of Boston University Law School and practiced at a prestigious law firm in Madrid, Spain before coming to Miami, was also a young man of noble sentiments who did his best to keep very close ties with his family and befriend all of those he met. Mariana, a native of Cali, was a graduate of Wellesley College where she had pursued a degree in political science and French. Upon graduation from this prestigious institution, Mariana obtained her MBA from the University of Miami.

The newlywed couple, who this January would have celebrated their third wedding anniversary, will be sorely missed by both of their respective families and by all of those who had the honor and pleasure of knowing them and the newest addition to their family.

Surviving Francisco in addition to his father and mother, the Honorable Maurice A. Ferre and Mrs. Mercedes Malaussena de Ferre, are his five siblings: Jose Luis, Maurice, Carlos, Mimi, and Florence. Immediate family members who survive Mariana are her parents, Mr. Gustavo Gomez Franco and Mrs. Maria Cristina Vallecilla de Gomez, and her six brothers and sisters: Enrique, Luciano, Maria Cristina, Roxana, Gustavo Felipe, and Julian.

Once again, I extend my deepest condolences to the Ferre family in these very trying times.

TRIBUTE TO RETIRING CALIFORNIA ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKIE SPEIER

HON. TOM LANTOS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 27, 1996

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the distinguished assemblywoman of the 19th assembly district of California, Ms. Jackie Speier. Many of the same communities in San Mateo County that are included in her State assembly district are also within the boundaries of the 12th Congressional District, which I have the privilege and honor to represent.

This coming weekend, the San Mateo County Democratic Party will salute Jackie Speier at a special appreciation dinner held to recognize the service she has rendered to the people of California. After a successful career in the California assembly, Jackie Speier will retire at the end of this legislative session. She will have completed her fifth term in the assembly and is not permitted to run again because of term limitations.

Jackie Speier was born in San Francisco the daughter of a German immigrant and an